A PLEA FOR Liberty of Conscience:

Grounded Upon

The HOLY WORD of GOD,

AND

The ROYAL WORD of the KING.

CONTAINING

Twelve Weighty Reasons

Against the Prosecuting of

Protestant-Dissenters

FOR

MATTERS OF RELIGION.

Humbly offered to the Consideration of all that are in Authority.

By JAMES JONES, a Protestant-Dissenter, and now a Prisoner for Nonconformity, in *Woodstreet-Compter*.

The Words of King *Artaxerxes*, when he Granted Liberty of Conscience to the *Jews*:

I make a Decree, That all they of the People of Israel, *which are minded of their own Free Will to go up to* Jerusalem, *go with thee.*

And whatsoever is Commanded by the God of Heaven, let it be diligently done for the House of the God of Heaven: for why should there be Wrath against the Realm of the King? Ezra. 7. 13, 23.

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these Men, and let them alone; for if this Counsel or this Work be of Men, it will come to nought.

But if it be of God, ye cannot over-throw it, least haply ye be found even to fight against God. Acts 5. 38, 39.

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BODLEIANA

PLEA

FOR

LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE:

CONTAINING

THE REVEALED WORD OF THE KING

AND

THE HOLY WORD OF GOD

A PLEA FOR Liberty of Conſcience,

In Twelve Weighty Reaſons.

I.

THE Firſt Reaſon is, Becauſe the Great God of Heaven and Earth, who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, hath not appointed any Forceable ways or courſes to bring men and women to conform to his Worſhip: God hath not appointed Death, or Baniſhment, or Impriſonment, or Loſs of Goods, as Puniſhments for ſuch as do not come to any part of *his Divine Service*. But God hath been graciouſly pleaſed to give his holy Scriptures, conſiſting of *Divine Precepts*, wherein is diſcovered Mans Duty; and *Precious Promiſes*, wherein is diſcovered Gods Mercy to thoſe that forſake wickedneſs, and walk in the ways of Godlineſs; and *Severe Threatnings*, wherein God hath diſcovered his Juſtice in thoſe Puniſhments that ſhall come hereafter upon ſuch as live and die in diſobedience: And God hath alſo graciouſly favoured the World with ſuch as can Preach the Will of God as it is contained in his holy word, whoſe work is to *inform* the *Judgment*, and *convince* the *Conſcience*, by gentle Inviting, ſweet Intreating, and ſpiritual powerful Perſwading the children of men to be reconciled to God; 2 *Cor.* 5. 20. *We pray you in Chriſts ſtead, be ye reconciled to God.* God hath not appointed *his* Church, nor *his* Biſhops, to ſtir up any Magiſtrates or Courts of Juſtice to grant Writs *de Excommunicato Capiendo*, to caſt Excommunicated Perſons into Goals, till they conform to *his* Church; neither hath God required any Pariſh Officers to Preſent ſuch Perſons as do not attend *his* holy Service, that ſo they may be Proſecuted at the Seſſions or Aſſizes, before the Juſtices or Judges of any Kingdom under Heaven. But he hath reſerved the puniſhing of ſuch Perſons unto himſelf; which is ſometimes done by affliction in this life from his own hand, and will be further done in the day of his Righteous Judgment, *When Chriſt ſhall come in Flaming Fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*; and then he will alſo *recompence tribulation to them that trouble his Servants*, 2 Theſ. 1. 7. 8.

II.

The Second Reaſon is, Becauſe the Kings Majeſty hath given his Royal Word and Promiſe to his Subjects, aſſuring them they ſhall enjoy Liberty of Conſcience. See his Majeſties Declaration from *Breda*, in *April* 1660. in theſe words: *We do declare a Liberty to Tender Conſciences, and that no man ſhall be diſquieted or called in queſtion for differences in Opinion in matters of Religion, which do not diſturb the Peace of the Kingdom; and that We ſhall be ready to conſent to ſuch an Act of Parliament, as upon mature deliberation ſhall be offered to Us, for the full granting that Indulgence.* Now let this his Majeſties Royal Promiſe be well conſidered:

Firſt, That it was *Freely* done, flowing from his own Princely Breſt, without being *Extorted* from him, or *Impoſed* on him, as any condition of his Majeſties Reſtauration.

Secondly, Conſider, That his Majeſty did wiſely diſtinguiſh between differences of Opinion in matters of Religion, and the Diſturbing the Peace of the Kingdom, and thereby did intimate his knowledge that though many of his Subjects by reaſon of Tenderneſs of Conſcience could not conform to that which might be the Eſtabliſhed Worſhip in his Kingdom, yet they might be ſuch good Subjects as not to diſturb the Peace of his Kingdom. And therefore let all ſorts of the Kings Subjects, whether men of low or high degree, take heed, that they do not diſgrace or affront this his Majeſties Royal Promiſe, by judging or Cenſuring ſuch of the Kings Proteſtant Subjects, againſt whom there is nothing but difference in matters of Religion, to be thereby Diſturbers of the Peace of the Kingdom.

Thirdly, Conſider that his Majeſty did in his Wiſdom judge it to be a mutual Happineſs for himſelf, as a King, and for his People, as Subjects, that there ſhould be Liberty of Conſcience.

Fourthly, Conſider that the King in his Declaration, dated *October* 25. 1660. Saith thus: in *p.* 18. *In a word, We do again renew what We have formerly ſaid in Our Declaration from* Breda, *for the Liberty of Tender Conſciences; That no man ſhall be diſquieted or called in queſtion for Differences in Opinion in matters of Religion, which do not diſturb the Peace of the Kingdom; and if any have been diſturbed in that kind ſince Our Arrival here, it hath not Proceeded from any Direction of Ours.* From which Words of his Majeſty, it will not be amiſs, by the VVay, to obſerve, That ſometimes his Majeſties Subjects may be diſturbed and troubled upon the ſcore of Conſcience, without his Majeſties Direction; and there is good Cauſe to believe that his Majeſty doth not know of the tenth part of the Diſtreſſes and Miſeries that his peaceable Subjects do now labour under in many parts of his Kingdom, only for Conſcience ſake, in thoſe things that are the matters of their God.

Fifthly, Conſider, That at the Opening of the Parliament on the Eighth day of *May*, 1661. His Majeſty VVas pleaſed to Expreſs himſelf thus in his Speech to both Houſes of Parliament, p. 1. *I do value My Self much upon keeping My Word, upon making good whatſoever I promiſe to My Subjects.* Which Words of his Majeſty, the Lord *Chancellour* in his Speech at the ſame time, took particular and ſpecial notice of, repeating them again thus: *He* (meaning his Majeſty) *told you but now that He values Himſelf much upon keeping His word, upon performing all that He promiſeth to His People.*

Sixthly, Conſider, That his Majeſty in his Speech to both Houſes of Parliament the Eighth of *July*, 1661. did with pleaſure Repeat this his Royal Promiſe

miſe, thus: *It is to put my ſelf in mind, as well as you, that I, (I think ſo often as I come to you) mention to you my Declaration from* Breda; *and let me put you in mind of another Declaration, publiſhed by your ſelves about the ſame time, and which I am perſwaded, made mine the more effectual, an honeſt, generous, Chriſtian Declaration, ſigned by the moſt Eminent Perſons, that had been the moſt Eminent Sufferers; in which you renounced all former Animoſities, and memory of former Unkindneſſes; And my Lords and Gentlemen, Let it be in no mans power to charge Me or You, with the breach of Our Words or Promiſes, which can never be a good Ingredient for Our future Security.*

Seventhly, Conſider, That His Majeſty in his Declaration of *December* 26. 1662. did account himſelf Maliciouſly Scandalized by ſome who did venemouſly inſinuate, That though he had made ſuch Solemn Promiſes of Liberty for Tender Conſciences, yet he had added ſtraighter fetters then ever. See His Majeſties own words in the ſaid Declaration, page 3. And in the 7th page of the ſame Declaration, His Majeſty doth again repeat his Promiſe from *Breda*, with great diſlike of thoſe that did maliciouſly inſinuate as if he were not for the performance thereof: Pray Conſider the following words of His Majeſty in that Declaration: *Concerning the Non-performance of Our Promiſes, We well remember the very words from* Breda, viz. *We do declare a Liberty to Tender Conſciences, and that no man ſhall be diſquieted or called in queſtion for Differences in Opinion in matters of Religion, which do not diſturb the Peace of the Kingdom; and that We ſhall be ready to Conſent to ſuch an Act of Parliament as upon mature deliberation ſhall be offered to Us, for the full granting that Indulgence. We remember well the Confirmations We have made of them ſince upon ſeveral Occaſions in Parliament; and as all theſe things are ſtill freſh in Our Memory, ſo are We* STILL FIRM *in the Reſolution of* PERFORMING THEM TO THE FULL.

And in Page the Eighth, His Majeſty doth in his Princely Wiſdom Expreſs himſelf thus: *We do conceive Our Selves ſo far Engaged, both in Honour, and in what We owe to the Peace of our Dominions, which We profeſs. We can never think ſecure, whilſt there ſhall be a colour left to the Malicious and Diſaffected to inflame the minds of ſo many multitudes upon the ſcore of Conſcience, with deſpair of ever obtaining any effect of Our Promiſes for their Eaſe.* Now from this his Majeſties Declaration, let theſe four things be ſoberly conſidered:

1. His Majeſties well remembring his Promiſe for Liberty of Conſcience.

2. His Majeſties being highly offended that any Perſon ſhould inſinuate as if he did not intend the performance thereof.

3. Conſider His Majeſties *Firm Reſolation to perform his Promiſe to the full.*

4. Conſider that His Majeſty would not have His Subjects upon the ſcore of Conſcience let fall their hopes, and ſo fall into deſpair of obtaining the Effects of this his Promiſe, *viz.* Liberty of Conſcience, for their Eaſe. And therefore I humbly hope that the mentioning of the former Particulars, as a Reaſon or Argument for Liberty of Conſcience, will not be offenſive to His Majeſty, or any that are in Authority, foraſmuch as there is yet cauſe (from His Majeſties own words) to hope for the benefit of what He hath ſo often promiſed.

Object. But ſome will be ready to Object and Say, That ſome of the Diſſenters have diſturbed the Peace of the Kingdom, ſince His Majeſty made this Promiſe.

Anſw. I anſwer, Thoſe that have, or thoſe that may be guilty of ſuch Crimes, let them ſuffer according to their Crimes: But it would be highly unreaſonable to deny all thoſe that are not Diſturbers of the Peace, to have the benefit of the Kings Royal Promiſe; ſince His Majeſty doth plainly declare that all his Peaceable Subjects ſhall enjoy the benefit of His Promiſe, *viz.* Liberty of Conſcience, without any diſquieting or diſturbance. And beſides this, His Majeſty hath declared a Reſolution to diſtinguiſh between the Innocent and the Guilty: I

pray conſider His Majeſties own words to both Houſes of Parliament, in his Speech *July* 8. 1661. *Let Us look forward, and not backward; (and never think of what is paſt, Except men put Us in mind of it, by Repeating Faults We had forgot; and then let Us remember* NO MORE *then what Concerns* THOSE VERY PERSONS.

III.

The Third Reaſon for Liberty of Conſcience, is, Becauſe the Proſecuting of Proteſtant Diſſenters for Matters of Conſcience, is a great diſquieting of the minds of great multitudes of his Majeſties good Subjects, and a great hindrance to the Trade of the Kingdom, the Diſſenters being a great part of the Trading people of the Kingdom, conſidered as Merchants and Shopkeepers, in this great City; and Clothiers, Farmers, and many other Tradeſmen in the Country, by which many thouſands of the Kings poor Subjects are maintained. And this very thing His Majeſty was pleaſed to take into His Princely Conſideration, when he put forth his Indulging Declaration, by the Advice of his Privy Council, in *March* 1672. after a violent Proſecution of that Act againſt Conventicles, in theſe very words: *But it being evident by the ſad Experience of twelve years, that there is very little Fruit of all thoſe Forceable Courſes; We think Our Self obliged to make uſe of that Supream Power in Eccleſiaſtical Matters, which is not only inherent in Us, but hath been Declared and Recognized to be ſo, by ſeveral Statutes and Acts of Parliament; and therefore We do now accordingly iſſue this Our Declaration, as well for the quieting of the minds of Our Good Subjects, in theſe Points, for Inviting of Strangers in this Conjuncture to come and live under Us, and for the better Incouragement of all to a cheerful following of their Trade and Callings; from whence We hope by the Bleſſing of God to have many good and happy Advantages to Our Government.*

IV.

The Fourth Reaſon is, Becauſe the Lords and Commons Aſſembled in Parliament, ſince theſe His Majeſties Declarations, have upon mature deliberation conſidered the ill conſequences of Proſecuting the Proteſtant Diſſenters by the Penal Laws, and have ſhewed their willingneſs to a Tolleration in and for matters of Conſcience.

V.

The Fifth Reaſon is, Becauſe the *French Proteſtants* (who are the Diſſenters from the Eſtabliſhed Worſhip of that Kingdom) are graciouſly and kindly received and ſuccoured both by the King and his People: and the *French King* is highly blamed by Engliſh Proteſtants for Perſecuting his Peaceable Subjects; and therefore there is much more reaſon that Proteſtants ſhould not Proſecute one another, as it is this day; to the very great dammage of many good Families, only for their Conſcience in matters of Religion: For this is to do the ſame things in *England*, that by *England* are condemned in *France*. Therefore let the words of the Apoſtle *Paul* be well conſidered, *Rom.* 2. 1,3. *Thou art inexcuſable O man, whoever thou art, that judgeſt: For wherein thou judgeſt another, thou condemneſt thy Self; for thou that judgeſt, doeſt the ſame things: And thinkeſt thou this, O man, that judgeſt them which do ſuch things, and doeſt the ſame, that thou ſhalt Eſcape the Judgment of God?*

VI.

The Sixth Reaſon is, Becauſe there is a great and good Agreement between the Conforming and Nonconforming Proteſtants, in the chief things of the Proteſtant Religion: As for inſtance; 1. Both Parties believe in the holy Trinity, *viz.* Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt; 2. That Jeſus Chriſt is very God, and very man, and the only Saviour of Sinners: 3. That Salvation doth depend

pend upon the miraculous Birth, the holy Life, the painful Death, the powerful Reſurrection, the joyful Aſcention, the Conſtant Interceſſion, and the glorious Second coming of Jeſus Chriſt. 4. Both Parties do Profeſs that the VVorſhip of God ought to be according to the holy Scriptures, & not according to the Inventions of any ſort of Mankind. 5. Both Parties do deny praying to Angels and deceaſed Saints, & both do alſo deny a Purgatory. 6. Both Parties do believe and profeſs that there is a Heaven of Everlaſting Joy for the Godly, and a Hell of Eternal Woe for the VVicked. 7. The Proteſtant Diſſenters do highly approve of, and are zealous for ſuch a Church as is deſcribed in the 19th Article of the Church of *England*; which is as follows, viz. *The Viſible Church of Chriſt is a Congregation of Faithful Men, in the which the Pure Word of God is Preached, and the Sacraments be duly Miniſtred, according to Chriſts Ordinance, in all thoſe things that of neceſſity are requiſite to the ſame.*

Now let theſe few things be Conſidered:

1. That the Proteſtant Diſſenters are Conſcienciouſly Careful to maintain Spiritual Communion in matters of Religion, with the moſt Faithful People; *viz.* Such as have true Faith in Chriſt, and that labour to live according to the faithful VVord of Chriſt, being thereby taught to live Soberly and Godly in this Preſent Evil VVorld, hating Profaneneſs, *viz.* Swearing, Curſing, Drunkenneſs, VVhoring, and all other kind of Debauchery.

2. Conſider, That they cannot in Conſcience keep up and maintain a holy Communion in Chriſts holy Ordinances with ſuch unholy Perſons, becauſe ſuch cannot be fairly Counted the Congregation of faithful People, who are ſo unfaithful to God, and unto their own Souls, and to the Proteſtant Religion, though Profeſſed by them.

3. Conſider, That the pure VVord of God is powerfully Preached in the Aſſemblies of Proteſtant Diſſenters, to the Converſion and Reformation of many of His Majeſties Subjects; and the Lords Supper is purely and peaceably Miniſtred among them, according to the beſt of their Underſtandings in the VVord of God, wherein they keep up a holy Remembrance of Chriſts Death, for the Salvation of their Souls: And therefore they ought not to be accounted Schiſmaticks and Sinful Separatiſts, but they ought to be owned as Furtherers and Promoters of the Purity of the Proteſtant Religion: Though inſtead thereof, they are Proſecuted as Seditious and Riotous Perſons.

VII.

The Seventh Reaſon is, Becauſe all ſorts of Perſons do deſire Liberty of Conſcience as a great Good for themſelves; Even thoſe that are for impoſing upon, and diſtreſſing of Others, would not be ſo dealt with themſelves; but would account it hard meaſure, yea, Cruelty, to be forc'd to *forbear* ſuch things in Religion, or *perform* ſuch things in Religion, as are againſt their Conſciences, or elſe to ſuffer in their Purſes or Perſons; as for inſtance, The Church Proteſtants would deem it a great Perſecution if they ſhould be puniſhed for not turning Presbyterians, Independents, Baptiſts, or Quakers: And why then ſhould they take pleaſure in puniſhing of, and ſo ſtrive to force any of the others to be of their minds, and conform to their manners of VVorſhip? Let ſuch rather obſerve the Words of Chriſt, *Mat.* 7. 12. *Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do ye even ſo to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

VIII.

The Eighth Reaſon is, Becauſe the uſing of Outward Compulſion in matters of Conſcience, is the ready Way to make men Hypocrites; for if Men Conform to any way of VVorſhip unwillingly, they cannot ſerve God acceptably;

IX.

The Ninth Reason is, Because Compulsion in matters of Conscience, is a breach of the good Rules of Humanity, and common Civility among all sorts of men, which is carefully observed in smaller matters; as for instance: Such is the Civility of men towards each other, that they abhor to force that Meat or Drink down the Throats of each other which will not agree with their Bodies; but do freely, and friendly say to each other, *Pray take that which doth best agree with you, and is most for the Health of your Bodies.* Now therefore for men to be so Civil to one another in Temporal things, respecting the Mortal Body, and to be so uncivil in Spiritual things, respecting the Immortal Soul, surely it may without Breach of Charity be judged a great breach of Humanity, and Christianity also.

X.

The Tenth Reason is, Because the Church Protestant in *England* have been sorely distressed by hot Persecutions from the hands of the Bloody Papists in the Reign of Queen [illegible] were accounted Criminals for not Conforming unto the Established Worship of the Kingdom; and therefore from thence not to persecute their Brethren, because they have been Persecuted themselves.

XI.

The Eleventh Reason is, Because both the Church Protestant, and the Dissenters are all in a like danger of the Popish Party, who are waiting for, and long to have the Government of *England* in their hands, (which God of his Infinite Mercy prevent) because they will make no difference between any sort of Protestants who are resolved to maintain their Protestant Principles and Protestant Practices; but they shall hang together, and burn together, as a Company of Schismaticks and Hereticks.

XII.

The Twelfth Reason is, Because the Protestant-Dissenters do not belong to, or own any Forreign Jurisdiction, but do abhor, detest, and protest against all Forreign Power and Jurisdiction over the King, Kingdom, or any of the Kings Subjects; neither are they covetous of any Preferment either in Church or State, but desire only to live a Peaceable life in all Godliness and Honesty, under Authority, as Gods Word doth direct. *And as this hath been the Practice of the General Body of the Protestant Dissenters of this Kingdom; So that it may still continue, shall be the Earnest Prayer and constant Endeavour of*

His Majesties Loyal (though Suffering) Subject,

James Jones.

Entred According to Order.

FINIS.